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# The Council Connection

*your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson*

July 1, 2021

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Next Saturday evening (the 12th), Alexandria will gather to celebrate our City's 272nd birthday. [We will bring back the fireworks we missed last year and enjoy a performance by the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra.](#)

While the event will not quite be "normal," it is a celebration we could not have a year ago. That fact that we are able to relegate to history one of the most difficult of our City's 272 years, is a testament to an army of volunteers from the Alexandria Medical Reserve Corps, our Health Department staff, various other public employees, non-profit

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organizations and private community partners.

As we transition from crisis to recovery, there will also be transition within our City government leadership. Last month, Chief Michael Brown, who has led our Police Department for the past 4 and a half years, announced that he will be retiring. Chief Brown has ably led APD through crisis and evolution, during an enormously challenging time for policing. I am deeply appreciative for his steady service to our City.

With Chief Brown's departure, [Don Hayes has been named as the Acting Police Chief](#). Chief Hayes has 40 years of committed service to our community in our Police Department. He is an excellent leader to guide the Department forward at this time.

Our City also learned of another significant departure last month. Completing over 2 decades of dedicated service in City government, including 6 years as our City Manager, Mark Jinks will be retiring at the end of 2021.

With a strong financial acumen and a heart for public service, Mark has steered a City government that weathered multiple storms (both actual and figurative), growth, change and adaptation. His leadership led to large infrastructure investments, new transit capacity, significant investments in our schools, economic development wins and unprecedented regional collaboration.

Throughout his time with the City, he remained committed to the men and women who provide the services our residents rely on and his focus on "good government" was unwavering.

The City Council will soon launch a national search to choose Mark's successor, but we thank him for his steadfast and impactful service to our community.

The City Manager's leadership has been critical during the past year and a half as our community has battled a deadly pandemic.

**As of yesterday, 91,046 Alexandrians have received at least one vaccine dose, which is over 66% of the eligible population of those 12 and older.**

**Of those, 77,214 are now fully vaccinated. While these are the official numbers from the Virginia Department of Health, they do not include Federal doses and out-of-state doses, which likely bring our numbers up further.**

**ANYONE who is aged 12 or older is eligible to be vaccinated and we have a dose waiting for you.**

**The City continues extensive efforts to educate and vaccinate those residents in our community who have not received these life-saving doses.**

**This past week, the Teen Wellness Center at Alexandria City High School began administering doses to interested students, their families and other community members.**

**The ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund was re-branded as the Alexandria Resilience Fund, which is distributing money into our community to support the many needs this crisis has created. Please join me in supporting this fundraising effort.**

**The latest updates will continue to be posted regularly on the City's Coronavirus website.**

**The Virginia Department of Health posts data daily online regarding positive tests, hospitalizations and deaths.**

**The Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association is posting daily updates regarding hospital capacity and capabilities.**

**I continue my monthly Virtual Town Hall meetings on the first Thursday of each month.**

**You can watch last month's Town Hall online and please join me at this link this evening at 8 PM to watch and participate live.**

**Volunteers are needed throughout our community. [Please refer to Volunteer Alexandria for opportunities to give back to those in need.](#)**

**We are still actively recruiting volunteers to [join our Alexandria Medical Reserve Corps](#). Medical Reserve Corps volunteers, both with and without medical training, have been critical to our efforts throughout this pandemic.**

**[Contact me anytime.](#) Let me know how I can help.**

## Initiatives and Updates



### The Rescue Plan In Alexandria

In March, President Biden [signed the American Rescue Plan into law](#). This sprawling and comprehensive piece of legislation provides significant resources to Alexandria's residents, our businesses, our schools and our local government.

[After surveying the community, we received an enormous amount of ideas and concepts](#) for how Alexandria could best deploy these resources to improve our City.

Last month, [our staff provided an initial ranking of these proposals for action by the City Council](#). Next week, the City Council will take final action on the first tranche of this funding. [Our staff has now provided two funding scenarios for our consideration on Tuesday](#). These scenarios reflect input received by the community and from City Council.

[Alexandria's government will receive a total of \\$59.4 million from the legislation, divided into two allotments, one that was received in May and the other to be received in May of 2022](#). All funds must be spent by December 31, 2024.

Beyond what the City will receive, the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) will receive \$35.4 million from this legislation. This is in addition to the \$15 million ACPS received from the [Federal legislation that was enacted before the end of last year](#).

The American Rescue Plan included three criteria for how the local government funds may be used:

- To respond to the public health emergency with respect to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-

19) or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality

- For the provision of government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue of such metropolitan city, nonentitlement unit of government or county due to such emergency
- To make necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

The Treasury Department recently released [an "Interim Final Rule," which ultimately provides detailed \(151 pages!\) guidance to localities as to how we can expend these dollars.](#)

This is a "once in a generation" infusion of money for Alexandria's City government and our school system. We must ensure that we not only spend every penny that the Federal government has provided to our community, but we also must use these resources wisely and to the long-term benefit of our community.

[I believe we should use this money to create sustainable structures that will not only help us recover, but benefit the City for decades to come.](#) Furthermore, given the substantial resources that ACPS, the Commonwealth and many Federal programs will be receiving, I believe that Alexandria's expenditure of these combined resources should be closely coordinated to ensure the maximum benefit for our community.

In May, the Governor and the leadership of the State Senate and House of Delegates [announced shared priorities for the expenditure of \\$4.3 billion that the Commonwealth will be receiving directly from this legislation.](#) The Governor has now called the General Assembly back into [a special session beginning a month from now to enact these priorities.](#)

While we continue our focus on the resources that will be directly appropriated to our local government, we must also commit resources to ensuring that each of our residents and our businesses avail themselves of portions of the legislation that might benefit them. The Rescue Plan is a large piece of legislation and our government can assist our residents and businesses in navigating its complexity.

Additionally, [the House of Representatives is bringing back what used to be known as "earmarks" and will now be called "Community Funding Requests."](#) In May, [Congressman Don Beyer released his funding requests under this new program,](#) including several priorities that were requested by Alexandria's City Council on behalf of our community.

In May of last year, the City received our **first tranche of Federal CARES Act** money. **We put that money to good use in benefit of the residents and businesses in need in our City.**

In June of last year, as we were on track to fully expend the \$13.9 million that the City received, **I wrote to urge the quick release of the second tranche of funding.** A year ago, **the Governor announced the allocation of that money** to address the significant need that remained.

From the beginning of this crisis, it has been clear that the two levels of government, local and state, who are required to balance our budgets annually, could not address the immense financial need that has been created. Only the Federal Government could provide a sufficient amount of money to address some of these challenges.

**While jurisdictions around the country have faced real criticism for frivolous expenditure of these scarce funds,** the City committed early in this crisis to ensure that we effectively used these funds to assist our residents and businesses who have suffered during this crisis and that we leave no dollar on the table. I believe we did just that.

**As we concluded last year and the original deadline for the expenditure of the CARES funds, the City used the entirety of the \$27.8 million we received:**

- \$8.9 million was utilized for the City's COVID-19 response (City staffing, PPE, public health investments, etc)
- \$4.1 million was utilized to address food insecurity in our City
- \$6.5 million was utilized for emergency rental assistance and eviction prevention efforts
- \$5.5 million was utilized for grants to small businesses
- \$2 million was utilized to provide resources to non-profits addressing need in our City
- \$800,000 was utilized to provide childcare to families in need

While we have expended significant amounts of money to address this crisis, the largest financial impact on the City has been the loss of revenue. The CARES Act funds were not allowed to replace the revenue that the City lost, but it did help us support the residents and businesses who are suffering during this time. The American Rescue Plan, however, does provide the flexibility to expend funding to address the significant revenue loss the City experienced.

As we put COVID-19 behind us, the hardship faced by our residents and businesses will continue for a while to come. The City will continue to find ways to provide the support required. I am hopeful we will take this opportunity to use these resources to wisely shape our future.

## Landmark Mall Redevelopment

On Tuesday, City Council will hold our July Public Hearing beginning at 5:30 PM. **City Council will be accepting public testimony and acting upon a series of land-use approvals that will transform the existing Landmark Mall site.** You **may sign-up to speak on this item online.** It is docket item 16.

Days before Christmas, **the City joined with a few partners, some familiar and some new, to announce the future of the Landmark Mall site.** The new development plan will move **Inova Alexandria Hospital** from its home for **the past 58 years** on Seminary Road to a new modern facility on the site of Landmark Mall.

The site, one of the largest sites inside the Beltway awaiting redevelopment, will see a billion dollars of new investment, including a new Level II trauma center, medical office buildings, residential, retail, parks, a new fire station replacing **Fire Station 208**, new committed affordable housing and a new transit hub anchoring the City's new bus rapid transit network, DASH and Metrobus.

**Long sought, this arrangement was recently named by the Washington Business Journal as the 2020 Real Estate Deal of the Year.**

This will not only revitalize a site that many had given up on, but will also provide a catalyst for redevelopment and enhancement throughout the West End of our City.

Last month, the City Council unanimously approved **a master plan amendment and rezoning of the site of the existing Inova Alexandria Hospital.** This land-use decision was the first legislative action required to bring this plan to reality.

Despite over two decades of decline, it is not a mystery why we had been unable to spur redevelopment on this site in the past. It is a complicated site, with a complicated ownership structure requiring significant infrastructure investment.

Conquering those obstacles requires a unique partnership and financial arrangement. A local firm, **Foulger-Pratt** is leading a joint venture in partnership with **Howard Hughes Corporation**, the



current owner of the mall site, and **Seritage Growth Properties**, the owner of the Sears site. They were able to bring **Inova Health System** into the arrangement to anchor this redevelopment.

The City will finance some of the infrastructure improvements required on the site and we will purchase the future hospital site to lease back to Inova. Inova's proceeds from selling their existing site on Seminary Road is financing their expenses related to the move.

Nearly 55 years ago, **then-Virginia Lieutenant Governor Mills Godwin Jr. (later Virginia's 60th and 62nd Governor) came to Alexandria to open Landmark Mall**. Today, the work to restore the Landmark Mall site to a productive use of real estate for our City is a top focus for our community.

In June 2013, after taking over ownership of the mall site, the Howard Hughes Corporation **received approval by the Planning Commission and City Council for a redevelopment of their portion of the site**. A slower than expected leasing market slowed their intentions to redevelop.

In 2015, Howard Hughes Corporation was back at City Hall to apply for very minor amendments to the approval that was issued in 2013. **These changes were approved by City Council in April of 2015.**

**Sears spun-off a new Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) in 2015 called Seritage Growth Properties to maximize value out of their remaining real estate. The Landmark Mall Sears store property is now owned by this REIT.**

**Early in 2017, Macy's announced the closure of their store at Landmark.**

**The Howard Hughes Corporation later announced that it had purchased the Macy's store site.**

**The Howard Hughes Corporation subsequently announced that the existing mall site is closing.**

**Over two years ago, Council approved revisions to the Master Plan to advance a comprehensive redevelopment of the site.**

There is no clearer demonstration of the City's financial challenges than the predicament that has faced Landmark Mall.

Two decades ago, when the ownership of the properties at Landmark Mall received their tax assessments from the City, the **actual mall site was assessed at \$76.4 million**. The **Sears store was assessed at \$19.7**



**million.** The **Macy's store site was assessed at \$17 million.**

At the City's tax rate in 2000, these three sites alone generated \$1.25 million in real estate tax.

Today, the three properties are assessed at \$25.2 million, \$14 million, and \$12.6 million, respectively. They generate about \$500,000 in real estate tax today, less than half of what it used to be.

To make the situation even more severe, real estate tax is only a portion of the picture. The reduction in revenues from sales tax, dining tax, and other business taxes has also been dramatic at this site.

While no one should be convinced until they see bulldozers knocking down the existing mall site, we have finally assembled a partnership, financing and a plan to revitalize this site. Landmark Mall redevelopment has been complicated from the beginning, but I believe we can be cautiously optimistic that it is finally coming together with this exciting partnership.

## **Community Health Improvement**

At the beginning of October of 2019, a little over 100 Alexandrians gathered at a public meeting to discuss our recently released **Community Health Assessment.**

This assessment compiles a variety of data from throughout our community to gauge the health of our residents.

The document itself reminds us that there are real and significant disparities in health around our community. The uncomfortable realities revealed by the report are that socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, national origin, education and even a resident's zip code can predict, among many other factors:

- Life Expectancy
- Access to healthcare, including mental health services
- Hospitalization rates
- Experiences with chronic conditions
- Cancer outcomes
- Fitness levels and obesity rates
- Access to healthy food

Little did we know at that point in October of 2019, that a little over 5 months later, we would begin the most dramatic demonstration of the impact of health inequities in our lifetimes, with the onset of the deadly pandemic. COVID-19 exploited and exacerbated the

inequities that the Community Health Assessment had documented.

The virus did not hit our community equally and the Community Health Assessment provides a very clear explanation for that disparity. Some of the very same **chronic conditions identified in that assessment are also comorbidities for COVID-19**. When disparities in access to healthcare, housing conditions and occupations are added to the mix, our community's experience with the pandemic was altogether predictable.

Yet the purpose of the assessment was not simply to identify these disparities, but instead actively seek ways to ameliorate them. Fortunately we know how to address these disparities. In nearly every plan the City has, from land-use plans, to park plans, to pedestrian and bicycle safety plans, to early childhood initiatives, school nutrition efforts, mental health reforms, etc, we are working to narrow these disparities.

Last month we released the follow-on to the assessment, **the Community Health Improvement Plan**. The community input received told us that by prioritizing housing, mental health and poverty, we can best address these community challenges. As such, the plan presented detailed and specific policy initiatives aligned to those priorities.

While preparing and presenting this plan is a significant step forward for our community, we must now ensure that the plan turns to action and is not left on the shelf.

There will be more opportunities for community involvement as we work to bring the plan to reality. **Check the project website for details!**



## Duke Street Transit

**We are working to bring new transit to Duke Street and we want your input!**

A little over a decade ago, the City adopted its latest **Transportation Master Plan**. At the time, the plan was a significant transition in that it shifted from a plan focused on roads and vehicle traffic, to a plan that prioritized transit.

One of the most significant changes that came from the 2008 Master Plan was the designation of three transit corridors for high-capacity transit. The three corridors were Transit Corridor A, which was nominally north to south on Route 1 on the east end of the City, Transit Corridor B, which was intended as east to west on Duke Street and Transit Corridor C, which was north to south

on the west end of the City using Van Dorn and Beauregard.

After the adoption of the 2008 Master Plan, [a community task force was assembled to provide some more details around the vision for each of the transit corridors.](#)

[Transit Corridor A began service as "Metroway" seven years ago, and was the region's first bus rapid transit service, providing service to Potomac Yard and Crystal City, which further enhancements planned.](#)

Transit Corridor C, now called the "West End Transitway" will be the next to come to reality. The West End Transitway has now been awarded [\\$73 million of State and Northern Virginia Transportation Authority \(NVTA\) funds.](#)

[The slower pace of redevelopment in the Beauregard corridor will necessitate multiple phases to implement this project. With funding now in place \(although not until 2024-2025\), work begins to plan the implementation.](#)

Transit Corridor B, the Duke Street Transitway, will be the final corridor implemented. A year ago, the City received \$75 million in regional funds from the NVTA to bring this new transit to reality.

Last week, [our staff held a webinar to provide more details on this effort. You can watch online.](#)

For the next month, [we are seeking your perspective in our online survey for this important project!](#)

High capacity transit provides our residents with alternatives to congestion and delay. I am optimistic as we work to bring these projects to reality.

## Debt/Borrowing

[Last month, the City Council authorized the issuance of up to \\$336.8 million in new bonds.](#)

These bonds will be used to finance school capital projects, the Landmark Mall redevelopment effort, other City capital projects and refunding of existing municipal bonds.

Ultimately, the City's actual bond issuance will be quite a bit lower, as we work to align the borrowing to the actual timing of when the resources will be needed on each project. Our staff will work to find the right timing, but the next bond issuance is expected to be this fall.

In October of last year, **S & P Global Ratings** and **Moody's Investor Services** both reaffirmed the City's bond ratings of AAA and Aaa respectively. The confirmation of these ratings, in advance of last year's refunding of \$46.1 million of existing debt, allows the City to access the lowest possible borrowing costs, saving the taxpayers millions over the life of our bonds.

A **municipal bond refunding** is essentially the municipal version of a mortgage refinancing, where the City is taking advantage of lower interest rates and replacing portions of our municipal debt with new debt at lower rates.

Through a competitive bidding process, the City awarded those new bonds to Morgan Stanley at a true interest cost of 1.54%. This new debt will result in a net present value savings of \$2.4 million. That savings will ease the burden on taxpayers as we address the financial shortfalls over the next few years.

Much like individuals must have a credit check performed before acquiring a mortgage, a car loan, or a new credit card, the City must go before Standard & Poor's and Moody's to have the two organizations assess whether we are doing a good job managing the City's finances.

In May, **the Council adopted our 10 year Capital Improvement Program, covering fiscal years 2022 - 2031.** Over the 10 year period, the program calls for \$2.65 billion in capital investment throughout the City. Over 35% of this funding goes to City and School municipal facilities. Another quarter goes to transportation initiatives, including Metro.

Our capital budget is funded primarily through a mix of debt and current year funding also known as "cash capital." Relating this to your home mortgage, the cash capital is the down payment. We also pay interest each year on the debt that was issued in previous years.

In issuing the City's rating, Moody's wrote: "Alexandria's financial position will remain stable given a trend of operating surpluses and improving cash and reserve levels, management's conservative budget assumptions, and future tax base growth."

Standard & Poor's similarly cited that "We view the City's management as very strong, with strong financial policies and practices..."

Over the past few years, I have pushed for new policies to make the City's balance sheet even stronger. **Nearly seven years ago, the Council unanimously adopted a new "cash capital" policy, which served to reduce debt levels and the risk of our borrowing.**

**Two years ago, the Council approved amendments to our "Spendable Fund Balance," essentially expanding the amount of reserves we have available.** This new policy was recommended by the City's Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee, and it was specifically cited by the rating agencies in support of our ratings.

Alexandria is very conservative with our use of debt.

Arlington County limits its debt to 4% of its Fair Market Real Property Value. Both Fairfax and Prince William Counties limit their debt to 3%. **Alexandria's self-imposed limit is 2.5%, and this budget year we achieved 1.5%.**

The median for other similarly rated and sized jurisdictions is 2.42%.

In fact, in the Standard & Poor's analysis, they noted that the City was rated higher than the "sovereign" (the US Federal Government) because "we believe the City can maintain better credit characteristics than the U. S. in a stress scenario."

Debt is a tool that allows us to balance the costs of large capital investments across the generations of Alexandria taxpayers that will benefit from them and to pay for our investments from the returns we reap from them.

It is important for us to maintain the careful stewardship that will protect our taxpayers and our City's infrastructure long into the future.

## **Potomac Yard Metro/Reducing Wetlands**

Less than a year from now, the new Metro Rail station at Potomac Yard will open for business!

**For a quarter of a century, the City has been working to bring an inline Metro Rail station to Potomac Yard. Just before the end of 2019, we broke ground and formally began construction of that station.**

**You can watch my remarks at the groundbreaking, as well as other remarks from those who participated, including the Governor, in the video the City has posted from the event.**

**You can review an update of construction activities, including photos on the City's website.**

On the front page of the **Final Environmental Impact Statement** for the Potomac Yard Metro Station are the

seals of four entities: Federal Transit Administration, Department of the Interior, WMATA and the City of Alexandria. Later in the report there is additional input from the US Army Corps of Engineers, the US Environmental Protection Agency and the National Capital Planning Commission.

The breadth of the entities involved clearly demonstrates the complexity of the project. This project is deeply complex and has been challenging to bring to reality for decades.

One of the trade-offs associated with this project was the impacts of the construction efforts on wetlands adjacent to the construction site. **In May we learned that due to careful management of the construction project, the permitted wetland impacts have been able to be significantly reduced.** While the permit that the City sought allows temporary impacts of just over 2 acres of property, the City now believes that the temporary impact will only affect just over 1 acre. This is a significant accomplishment that further reduces the environmental impact of this important project.

**The Potomac Yard Metro project will facilitate the creation of up to 26,000 new jobs and will bring up to \$2 billion of new tax revenue to the City (over 30 years). It removes thousands of vehicles from one of the most crowded corridors in our City. It promotes the creation of the kind of walkable community our City has long desired in Potomac Yard.**

In 2008, along with then-Councilman Rob Krupicka, I proposed a new start to efforts to bring Metro to Potomac Yard. **We included language in the City's Transportation Master Plan** explicitly calling for a new station at Potomac Yard. We also tied the construction and funding of Metro to the development occurring in the Yard.

The result is **a funding plan for Potomac Yard Metro** that not only leverages the development activity in Potomac Yard, but also does so without requiring the contributions of General Fund taxpayers.

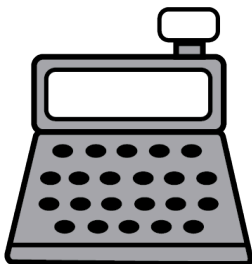
The total project budget is \$370 million:

- \$200 million is being derived from tax revenues generated in Potomac Yard
- \$70 million is regional transportation revenues provided by the **Northern Virginia Transportation Authority**
- \$50 million is **financing from the Virginia Transportation Infrastructure Bank (VTIB)**
- \$30 million was provided by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation to support the new southwest entrance

- \$20 million was provided as part of Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) to support the new southwest entrance

The largest environmental, [economic development](#), and transportation initiative in our City's history is being accomplished using [one of the most innovative funding mechanisms used anywhere in the country](#).

I am excited to see this project come to reality.



## Taxpayer Receipt

I have now been a part of adopting eleven City budgets as a member of the Council. Each year, I try to find new ways to engage residents in the process, and increase transparency and understanding of budget priorities and trade-offs.

A few years ago, I worked with the staff in our City's Office of Management and Budget to create a [Real Estate Tax Receipt Calculator](#).

Modeled after the [Federal Taxpayer Receipt](#), this website will take the assessed value of your home and detail how much of your real estate tax is going to the various programs and services of City government.

We entered Fiscal Year 2022 this morning. Accordingly, we have updated the receipt to reflect the newly enacted budget. Give it a try and [let me know](#) how you like it!

## Help Make Roads Safer

Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets (NoVA FSS) is releasing an updated Near Miss / Dangerous Location Survey, which allows community members to report dangerous incidents on streets, sidewalks, and trails.

In partnership with the Virginia Tech Graduate School of Urban Planning, whose students helped upgrade the survey, as well as regional advocacy groups, this application will be able to collect and analyze vital pedestrian / vulnerable road safety data and share this information with the relevant municipal staff in each jurisdiction. The survey allows people to report specific location, circumstance of the danger, and other details of the near miss. Powered by Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, the survey provides a wealth of data and analysis that will be used to advocate for:

- Improved road infrastructure,
- Increased police vigilance at specific locations,
- better traffic safety regulations



- the Vision Zero goal of zero traffic fatalities and serious injuries in Alexandria, Arlington, and Fairfax.

People can submit data through the survey anonymously or can opt-in to share their information to be included in any reports to authorities. [The survey can be accessed online.](#)



## New Campaign

I try to keep politics out of this monthly newsletter.

[In January, I did announce that I will be running for re-election as Mayor this year.](#)

[Last month, I again received the Democratic nomination and I will be on the ballot for re-election this November.](#)

If you have not been receiving my campaign updates and you wish to receive information on this new campaign, [please drop my campaign a line](#) and we'll get you on the list for the campaign.

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